



Courtesy of Cayuga Museum of History and Art, Auburn, New York
Fillmore's Birthplace was a log cabin in Locke, N.Y. The cabin, now restored, appears here as it looked during Fillmore's youth.



MIND'S EYE

**Photo and text
by David Bly**

*There's a warm sort of comfort
in building
from what the land
has to offer.*

Roots Were Planted Deep

Early pioneers in Utah settled on the land and whether their homes were dugouts, log cabins or finished adobe brick mansions, the intent was to remain and build stable society and culture. Typical pioneer families and scenes are shown in these photographs by pioneer photographer George Edward Anderson of Springville. They are from the Anderson collection at Brigham Young University Library.

Dressed in their "Sunday Best," this prosperous farmer's family posed for photographer Anderson in the 1880s.



Less prosperous were these settlers posing at the Tidwell Cabin in Sunnyside, Carbon County, who may have been coal miners or railroad workers. Windowless cabin had a dirt roof.



"Tidwell Cabin" Sunnyside R.G.W.
C.B. Anderson Photo
Springville Utah

Log home boom rises from ashes of Idaho beetle infestation

By Marny L. Clifford
For the Associated Press

IDAHO FALLS — The pine bark beetle infestation that swept the Targhee National Forest among others in the 1970s has done someone some good after all: the log home industry.

The epidemic has created massive amounts of dead, standing timber, prompting log home manufacturers to zero in on logs that are long on stability and short on expense.

Manufacturers have congregated in southwestern Montana since the mid-70s. Several firms have lined up along U.S. 93 between Salmon and Missoula. Others operate in southeastern Idaho, among them Heritage Solid Wood Homes, south of Idaho Falls.

Heritage Homes is the phoenix that rose from the ashes of a collapsed power pole business. Bill Shurtleff, part owner of Heritage and owner of Garland Cail Pole Company, said his firm once sold up to 40,000 or 50,000 power poles annually.

Then came the pine beetles.

"We were devastated in '72 and '73. When the bug epidemic got to be as-trophic, and we couldn't move these power poles. We had to do other things with the timber," Shurtleff said.

Shurtleff also runs a timbering operation in Ashton. He sadly remembers burning the big timber that he thought had no value.

"We burned some beautiful timber, great big, straight stuff, just piled it into slash piles and burned it."

Now, in addition to timbering and the pole yard, Shurtleff sells 25 to 50 log homes annually.

Lynn Youngstrom, owner of Yellowstone Log Homes in Rigby, annually ships 200 to 250 packages of logs nationwide.

"People think logs are all the same, and actually they're as different as night and day," he said.

Dead or green, hand-hewn or machined, tongue-and-groove — each has its proponents. The point is to build a tight structure that won't settle, with logs that won't shrink.

Everyone involved with log homes has horror stories about snowdrifts at the foot of owners' beds, or the cases of caulk some poor homeowner went through trying to seal up his walls.

As with any young industry, a number of the early competitors have folded, leaving some dissatisfied customers.

"The log industry is a relatively new industry, so when we first started up, everybody jumped in," said Dick Neville, owner of Neville Log Homes in Darby, Mont. "People that didn't know pine from pineapples got into it for the buck. They put out material that just wasn't good material, like using green logs and not allowing for settling."

Settling is one of the problems the industry has struggled with. The consensus is that no matter the logs' condition, expect about an inch of settling. Most manufacturers advise builders to take that into account around the windows and doors.

Dee Henry, a log home owner in Ashton, jokes that an eight-inch log will shrink an inch a year, for ten years.

But she's serious when she advises buyers "get a contractor who knows what he's doing." And she's not alone.

"One of our big problems is contractors," Neville said. "Say we ship a house to Portland, Ore., and the buyer goes out and gets a contractor. He pads the hell out of it, because he's never done one before and he's scared to death of it. So there goes our customer."

A network of builder-distributors helps some manufacturers avoid such problems. Yellowstone Log Homes works with about 100 dealers, many of whom double as contractors.

Log homes are often built by do-it-yourselfers. While some will give up half-way through, others relish every weekend of labor.

"It's kind of fun, like working with overgrown Tinker Toys," said Mike Olson of Rigby. Olson is working on his second log home.

Kurt McKenzie and his father, Dan, have been working on their Rigby home in their spare time for eight years. "It's a real pride and joy," McKenzie said.

Do-it-yourself construction aside, log homes are no cheaper than conventionally built homes.

Jim Birdsong, executive director of the North American Log Home Council, in Washington, D.C., said there is little difference in the costs of similarly sized conventional and log homes built on similar ground.

Mark Moreland at Rocky Mountain Log Homes in Hamilton, Mont., agrees costs aren't cheaper. "Unfortunately in the past we've had competitors who tried to market the product that way. It's a pretty large misconception among the home-buying public that that is the case and it's not," he said.

Heating costs stack up favorably though.

Solid wood has an unimpressive R-value, the conventional measure of a wall's energy efficiency. But log homes did well in an energy efficiency

study done by the National Bureau of Standards, Birdsong said. Current theory holds that the thermal mass of the wood allows it to absorb and release heat over time as masonry or stone would.

Insulation and R-values offer one example of how log homes have been the odd man out with building codes and financial institutions across the nation.

Acceptance into the Uniform Building Code and gaining eligibility for Federal Home Administration loans has been a struggle, Youngstrom said.

Bill Fleming, FHA spokesman in Boise, said some manufacturers have been approved. One of FHA's prime concerns has been log homes that are built without proper foundations, he said.

But in one sign of a maturing industry, logs for log homes can now be graded, as are most timber products. "Now that the industry has grading standards, people are more assured of a quality product," Youngstrom said.

Idaho and Montana manufacturers ship log packages all over the United States. Yellowstone Log Homes has done business in 46 states, including Alaska and Hawaii; only about 5 percent of its sales are in Idaho.